

Additionally, in order to avoid having "orphaned" or non-related items of data present in the database, it is desirable to provide the capability of associating such items of data with other, similar products, based on shared attributes. Thirdly, it is desirable to reduce the time required to complete a parameter-based product search of a database.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention will be described in detail with reference to the following drawings in which:

FIG. 1 is a flowchart illustrating a method for normalizing and associating gathered product information into a database in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a table for translating or normalizing diverse product identifiers to the same products to which they are referring;

FIG. 3 is a table associating core product identifiers with corresponding domains and attributes;

FIG. 4A is a database file format showing the arrangement of product information for retrieval;

FIG. 4B is a character string look up table associating a multiplicity of character strings with unique integers;

FIG. 5 is a schematic diagram of a system for collecting, storing, and outputting product information in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention; and

~~FIGS. 6, 7A, 7C, 8, 9 and 10~~
~~FIGS. 6, 7A, 7C, 8 and 9~~ are examples of displays of information obtained as a result of the method of FIG. 1.